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Title

Adult Transitional Theory and Transfer Shock in Higher Education: Practices from the Literature

Structured Abstract

Purpose:
To outline foundational research on adult transition theory and transfer shock in higher education to provide the reader with a theoretical and practical framework for the library focused articles in this special issue.

Design/Methodology/Approach:
A review of relevant higher education literature related to transfer shock, as well as core research related to adult transitional theory.

Findings:

Transition is a period in-between moments of stability. The state of confusion and disorientation caused by the transition of transfer students from one academic culture to another is a form of culture shock known as transfer shock.

"Transfer shock" references the decline in academic performance by transfer students immediately following transition to an institution of higher education and the corresponding recovery prevalent for most students in succeeding semesters. Recent studies have expanded the definition of transfer shock to include the academic and social factors that contribute to attrition and lack of degree persistence.

Key factors that correlate to transfer student success or failure include gender, race, time of transfer, GPA, prior academic success, faculty collaboration, level of engagement with degree program and campus support.

Originality/Value:
While most scholarship on transfer students published by librarians includes literature reviews citing relevant articles, scholarship lacks an extensive literature review collecting research from social science and education literature.

Keywords

Higher education, Transfer shock, Transfer students, Student success, Community Colleges, Junior Colleges

Paper Type

Literature Review

Introduction

This special issue of *Reference Services Review (RSR)* contains a collection of articles centered around initiatives, programs, and research by university and college libraries for transfer students and other students in transition. However, it is important not to consider the library's relationship with transfer students in a vacuum, isolated from existing research in the social sciences and education. Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to outline foundational research on adult transition theory and transfer shock in higher education, which will provide the reader with a theoretical and practical framework for the library focused articles in the rest of this special issue.

Adult Transition Theory and Culture Shock

This article begins with a discussion of research on adult transition theory and the narrower concept of culture shock. This review is not meant to be exhaustive; only a small portion of the extensive research written on these topics is included. Instead, the authors have attempted to identify core and foundational research that has been highly cited and/or influential. The authors hope that a familiarity with this foundational research will provide the reader with a framework for the discussion of transfer shock in higher education presented later in this article.

Defining "Transition"

One can define transition by describing the moment of transition itself, but the risk with doing so is that it is tempting to use words like crisis or upheaval that carry negative connotation (Schlossberg *et al.*, 2006, p. 33). Bridges provides a useful, nonjudgmental term for describing the transitional period: "neutral zone" (Bridges, 1991, p. 6). However, the moment of transition can still be hard to describe because it could be a non-event, or the absence of an event that was expected (Schlossberg *et al.*, 2006, p. 33).

For these reasons, it is preferable to define transition by what it is not: it is not a period of stability. It is "a period between two periods of stability" (Schlossberg *et al.*, 2006, p. 24). Bridge's book about transition has a business perspective, and holds that a successful "transition begins with letting go of something" (Bridges, 1991, p. 5). These periods of instability can be either foreseen or unexpected, but they must involve moving out of one sociocultural environment and into another (Schlossberg *et al.*, 2006, p. 50). It is not enough for social and cultural elements of a person's life to be unstable, transition also requires that an individual goes through some kind of internal re-adjustment. Change alone is not transition (Bridges, 1991). Parkes proposed the idea of "psychosocial transition," a change that requires "the abandonment of one set of assumptions and the development of a fresh set to enable the individual to cope with the new altered life space" (Parkes, 1971, p. 103). The move into or out of a socio-cultural system must have some correlating impact on the person moving. Finally, transition requires self-awareness on the part of the person experiencing change. Change around and inside of a person has less of an impact than that person's perception of the change. If the person is not

aware that a transition in their lives is happening, the change is just change. It is only through awareness that change can be defined as actual transition (Schlossberg *et al.*, 2006).

So transition can be defined as a period in-between moments of stability, initiated by the move between two socio-cultural systems, and in which a person is aware of changes in their environment that cause an internal re-adjustment. These transitions can have various levels of difficulty both innately and relatively: “(a)n anticipated change for one person— going to college— might be unanticipated for another" (Schlossberg *et al.*, 2006, p. 35). The level of difficulty that individuals experience with a transition causes a state of confusion and disorientation that is known as “transition shock” (Bennett, 1977, p. 45; Schlossberg *et al.*, 2006, p. 31). How an individual overcomes this state of shock/confusion, and how others can provide assistance with doing so, is at the heart of most transition theory.

Coping With Transition Shock

Bridges’ book provides a business-oriented example of how transition affects an individual’s life: “people in the neutral zone [transition] miss more workdays than at other times” (1991, p. 35). In order to move through the transition process as quickly and efficiently as possible, individuals in transition must identify and retain the continuities that persist through the transition (Bridges, 1991). They must also exercise self-care by fostering their own creativity and allowing themselves both time to process the transition and time to step back from the process altogether (Bridges, 1991).

In 1981, Schlossberg developed a transition framework that is presented in more detail in her book’s 2006 edition. At the core of her model is the concept of "balancing assets and liabilities.” As she describes it, “[c]oping effectiveness is best examined and explained by using a model that balances opposing forces. Individuals have both assets and liabilities and resources and deficits” that must be balanced in order to ensure successful coping (Schlossberg et al., 2006, p. 56). Schlossberg encourages individuals to consider those assets and liabilities when choosing coping mechanisms for dealing with transition. These mechanisms can be internal (palliative) or external (changing the environment / instrumental), and are demonstrated through “direct action, inhibition of action, information seeking, and intrapsychic” (Schlossberg et al., 2006, pp. 78-82). This is similar to the model presented by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, though a key aspect of their theory is a feedback loop, wherein individuals assess and reassess situations and coping mechanisms repeatedly based on results.

Culture Shock

Various subtypes of transition shock have been identified by researchers, but the one most commonly discussed and the most applicable to transfer students and other students in transition is “cultural shock.” The concept of culture shock was popularized by Kalervo Oberg in 1960, but it wasn’t until 1977 that Janet Bennett identified it as a form of transition shock. Oberg’s original use referred to an anxiety caused by losing “familiar signs and symbols of

social intercourse," but she categorized this anxiety as a mental illness (Zapf, 1991, p. 107). Bennett, in turn, redefined culture shock as merely "a transition shock in the context of an alien cultural frame of reference" (Bennett, 1977, p. 46).

Culture shock is often discussed in the context of overseas travel. This is the context for foreign exchange students who have traveled from overseas to the United States for college. However, even American students find the transition from high school to college (or from one college to another) similar to being dropped into a foreign nation. "Culture shock should more properly be labeled change shock, if shock it is to be. Change anywhere demands accommodations" (Anderson, 1994, p. 297). The new environment into which someone has been dropped will have its own rules, meanings, and values that are different from the individual's previous environment (Zapf, 1991, p. 106), and the individual must manage the transition between the two.

Early culture shock and adjustment research fell into several categories (Martin, 1984, p. 117), but the U-curve is the most commonly used culture shock model, used as far back as 1955 (Lysgaard, 1956). Perhaps the U-curve model is so popular because of both its simple concept (the individual starts at a high point, goes through a transition slump in success/happiness, and then returns to a high level), and its optimism (it assumes that the individual will resume a high level of success/happiness after working through the transitional challenges) (Zapf, 1991, p. 115). However, the validity of the U-curve model has been called into question by researchers who find that it does not correctly represent the complicated path taken by individuals working through culture shock. In addition, it does not acknowledge the possibility that some individuals will not successfully emerge at a high point (Zapf, 1991, p. 112; Martin, 1984, p. 119; Anderson, 1994, p. 297).

Regardless of whether the process fits a U-curve or not, culture shock is not to be taken lightly and can have real impact on an individual's ability to successfully navigate a new situation. Individuals suffering from culture shock may experience anxiety, paranoia, irritability, depression, lowered self-esteem, communication issues, disorderly internal beliefs and values, and isolation (Bennett, 1977, pp. 46-47; Anderson, 1994, p. 301, Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963, p. 43). Such symptoms can be disastrous for anyone, but particularly new higher education students struggling with coursework at the same time.

Coping With Culture Shock

When coping with or preparing for culture shock, it is important to remember that the new environment itself does not cause the culture shock; rather, shock is caused by the interaction between an individual (along with their existing behavior and habits) and the new environment (Zapf, 1991, p. 107). The absence of the old environment contributes as much to this frustration as does the presence of the new environment, as described by Bennett (1977):

> It is important to note here that it is not merely the loss of the frame of reference that causes culture shock, but the defensiveness that such a loss engenders. It is not merely "not knowing what to do," but it is more a case of not being able to do what one has come to value doing. Recognition of the inappropriateness of our responses arouses tremendous inconsistency. (p. 47)

To move through this period of frustration, it is essential for an individual to demonstrate empathy in order to "intellectually and emotionally participate in an alien experience" (Bennett, 1977, p. 49). As they experience a new culture, some people become "monistic," able to only fully belong to one culture of the two cultures (Bennett, 1977, p. 48). Such individuals either reject the new culture and fully retreat (sometimes literally) to the familiar culture, or fully embrace the new culture and reject the familiar (which may lead to an equal culture shock if the individual returns to their home culture). Instead, it is more ideal for an individual to either assimilate parts of the new culture into his/her existing frame of reference, or to assemble an entirely new internal culture by incorporating bits and pieces of both old and new cultures (Bennett, 1977, p. 48). Either way, such a blending of cultures will allow the individual to thrive in both the new culture and in the old.

Finally, prior to going through culture shock, individuals may find it useful for cultural shock to be explained and normalized. If an individual knows that the frustration is a documented, natural, and "time-limited" phenomena, then that individual can move forward rather than being consumed by a sense of personal failing (Zapf, 1991, p. 113). Culture shock is not a mental health issue, merely "the development of competence in response to challenges" (Anderson, 1994, pp. 321–322). Such a "development of competence" is part of higher education's mission, and so this seems a particularly apt point at which to move this article into a discussion of culture shock in higher education, specifically the transfer shock experienced by many transfer students.

Transfer Shock in Higher Education

Students face periods of transition following transfer to new institutions of higher education and experience culture shock which impacts progress toward degree attainment. Research has focused on the experiences of junior college students transferring to four-year colleges and universities, but additional studies document a similar transition experienced by students transferring between like institutions. The first identifiable study of the transfer function comparing transfer student performance in higher education with that of "natives" (students who attended the senior institution for the entirety of their academic program) was conducted by Eells at Stanford University in 1927. Eells studied the performance of 510 junior college transfers and determined that they performed better than their native peers following their first quarter at Stanford and graduated with a higher share of graduation honors (p. 187).

Additional early findings relating to student transition confirmed Eells early research noting the academic performance of junior college students typically fell below their cumulative grade point average (GPA) in the first term immediately following transfer, but that the grades of those students who did persist in four-year institutions generally improved in successive terms. In 1965, Knoell and Medsker published a landmark study documenting the decline in performance experienced by junior college students following transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The nationwide study of 7,243 transfer students illustrated a first term differential of -0.3 letter grade following transfer for the entire group (p. 21). Attrition was also higher for junior college students in the upper division and these students often required more time than native students to complete their degree programs (Knoell and Medsker, 1965, pp. 6-7). The 1992 meta-analysis of transfer studies by Patricia Diaz notes subsequent research has focused upon GPA comparisons to illustrate the impact of transition on transfer students, as GPA is the most widely used index for transfer student admission (p. 280).

Defining Transfer Shock in Higher Education

While the effects of transition on transfer student GPA were observed in early studies (Eells, 1927; Martorana and Williams, 1954; Bird, 1956; Knoell and Medsker, 1965), the phrase "transfer shock" was first coined by John R. Hills in 1965 (p. 203). Hills provided a comprehensive review of more than twenty studies, from hundreds of institutions, incorporating forty-six data sets relevant to transfer shock and its impact on the academic performance of junior college transfer students. According to Hills (1965), transfer shock specifically references the temporary decrease in a student's overall GPA following the completion of the first or second semester at a new institution of higher education. Hills' research confirmed the results of Knoell and Medsker's 1965 study documenting the appreciative loss in the level of grades experienced by transfer students immediately following transfer and the corresponding recovery common for most students in the succeeding semesters (Hills, 1965).

In 2000, Rhine *et al.*, expanded the phrase, "transfer shock" to include the academic and social factors that contribute to attrition and lack of degree persistence often exhibited by transfer students. Social factors such as advanced age, strained finances, employment, marital status, availability of financial aid, and maximum amount of transferable credit hours are all seen as underlying factors contributing to the phenomenon of transfer shock and difficulties in transition for transfer students (pp. 445-446). The study also highlighted the lack of coordination exhibited between the sending and receiving institutions as contributing factors in transfer students' failure to complete their degree plans in a timely manner. "Such failures have tangible negative results for institutions and students who face pressures to complete bachelor's degrees in an efficient manner" (Rhine *et al.*, 2000, p. 443-444).

Characteristics that distinguish transfer students from their native counterparts are well-documented in Stewart and Martinello's 2012 study. The researchers contend that in the

realm of postsecondary education, student performance and progress toward degree attainment is multidimensional and, as a result, “not well captured by a single measure such as final course grades” (Stewart and Martinello, 2012, p. 28). This belief is also supported by Pascarella *et al.* (1986, p. 20), who conclude, “the successful integration of a student’s academic goals and social pressures is the determining factor in student persistence.” A similar recommendation is proposed by Mobley *et al.* (2012) in their study documenting the culture shock faced by transfer students which suggests that both institutional as well as individual-level factors must be evaluated when designing programs to support and improve transfer student retention.

Research About Transfer Shock in Higher Education

In response to the impact of transfer shock on the transfer function of the community college and the resulting attrition and persistence of transfer students at institutions of higher education, studies about transfer shock increased in the 1970s and ‘80s. Thurmond (2007) notes that the increase in research paralleled the increased enrollment in community colleges in the ‘70s and ‘80s, and the resulting transfer to four-year institutions that followed. Thurmond cited a decline of .20 to .30 points in GPA of transfer students immediately following transfer and noted that transfer students’ grades tended to regain the level of native students following the first semester of enrollment (Thurmond, 2007, para. 4).

In direct opposition to such studies, Nickens challenged the widely held cause and effect theory supporting the idea of transfer shock. A paper presented by Nickens in 1972 at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association called into question the phenomenon associated with the use of the phrase “transfer shock.” Nickens’ review of 926 baccalaureate degree candidates at Florida State University in 1968 did in fact reveal the corresponding shock and recovery of transfer students. However, Nickens asserts that the decline and corresponding recovery of transfer students’ GPAs showed no evidence of direct impact from the transfer function, but could instead be accounted for by academic variables such as differences in grading practices among institutions, lack of parity in regard to the requirements of student majors, the inherent academic ability of students and, lastly, student attrition (Nickens, 1972, p. 7). Once the variance accounting for performance on the Florida Twelfth Grade Test was removed, results for GPA attainment between first term junior year junior college transfers and native Florida State University students showed no statistically significant difference. Furthermore, the characteristic recovery following first semester completion of transfer students also showed no significant difference from native students once attrition was accounted for in both groups (Nickens 1972, p. 8). The research that followed in the ‘80s and ‘90s contributed to the awareness of contributing and mitigating factors associated with the phenomenon of transfer shock, with studies showing that demographic factors such as age, gender, and race were seen to contribute to varying levels of decreased performance following transfer (Thurmond, 2007, para. 5).

Subsequent research focused on the need to identify students intending to transfer early in their educational journey to ensure collaboration and coordination between sending and receiving

institutions to support transition and mitigate transfer shock. Rhine *et al.*, (2000) notes advisors should maintain connections at partner institutions to ensure knowledge of program and degree requirements of receiving institutions and aspire to author articulation agreements to coordinate academic degree paths. Attempts to design a support network that prepares students for the potential drop in first semester GPA, financial implications of transfer to a new institution and that transitions with students following transfer can ensure the psychological and financial preparation of the student to face the difficulties of transfer shock and transition (Rhine *et al.*, 2000, p. 450). Thurmond reinforces the importance of early intervention as the key to increasing awareness of the student to the hazards of transfer shock prior to transfer and recommends transfer mentor-mentee programs as platforms to mitigate culture shock and assist students in transitioning and engaging in the academic and social offerings of the new institution (2007).

Schmidt and Wartick (2013) address the effects of transfer shock and highlight the critical impact that the time of transfer and prerequisite course sequence has on transfer student success. Despite evidence of grade inflation from the referring institutions and controlling for academic aptitude and key demographic factors, researchers found transfer students performed significantly worse than native students. The practical (as opposed to theoretical) curriculum offered by community colleges and the gap in time between the enrollment in lower level and higher level courses often contribute to the transfer shock experienced by students. Recommendations include providing transfer students with remediation assistance to mitigate the time lag between courses and refreshing discipline knowledge to ensure success in upper-level division coursework (Schmidt and Wartick, 2013).

Key Factors of Transfer Student Success and Failure

Research on transfer students over the past few decades has uncovered several key factors that correlate to transfer student successes and failures. These include gender, race, time of transfer, GPA and prior academic success. Additional factors include level of campus involvement, faculty collaboration, degree program transferring into, level of engagement with the degree program and negative original perspective. These key factors were found to impact transfer student successes and failures at a wide range of institutions, from large research universities to small liberal arts colleges.

Gender and Race

A six-year longitudinal analysis of transfer student performance and retention at a large southwestern state university found that transfer students were just as likely to complete their degrees as non-transfer students; however, gender and ethnicity correlated to transfer student performance and retention (Holahan *et al.*, 1983). This study found male transfer students graduated at a higher rate than female transfer students and that there was a substantial difference between graduation rates among the three ethnic categories studied (Holahan *et al.*, 1983). Keeley and House's (1993) study on the effect of transfer shock at Northern Illinois

University determined that women started off with higher transfer GPAs than men and outperformed men throughout their time at the new institution. Their results also found that minority students entering with lower GPAs experienced a higher degree of transfer shock and had lower GPAs than non-minority students (Keeley and House, 1993). More recently, Lui (2013) studied Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) transfer students at a large midwest university and found that while AAPI students did experience transfer shock, their graduation rates were comparable to students in other race groups.

Time of Transfer, GPA and Prior Academic Success

Students who transfer at the junior level with their associate degrees experience less transfer shock and achieve higher success at the university level than students transferring at other times during their academic careers (House, 1989; Keeley and House, 1993; Best and Gehring, 1993). Transfer students from community colleges classified as juniors showed higher graduation rates, higher grade point averages, and lower dismissal rates than students who transferred as freshmen or sophomores (House, 1989). Keeley and House (1993) studying sophomore and junior transfers at Northern Illinois University found the key factors that contributed the most to transfer student academic success were earning an associate degree before transferring, being 25 years of age or older, and being female. A more recent study focusing on students transferring between four-year institutions found that students who stop going to school and restart again are 71% less likely to complete their bachelor's degree, while students who attended continuously from one institution to another are only 31.9% less likely to complete their degree (Li, 2010).

A study conducted by Carlan and Byxbe (2000) comparing the GPA of transfer students and native students at a major university in the southern United States found the transfer student's first semester GPAs at the university were lower than their cumulative GPAs at the community college. While the researchers found that transfer students experienced transfer shock, their grades improved after the first semester and were similar to the grades of native students by graduation (Carlan and Byxbe, 2000). A similar study of transfer students at a large university in North Carolina also found that while transfer students initially experienced transfer shock, they recovered from the initial decline in GPA and their GPA at graduation was equal to or greater than the native students (Glass and Harrington, 2002).

Academic achievement prior to transferring has been cited as a key factor in transfer student success. Townsend *et al.* (1993) found that students with a high GPA at a community college maintained that high GPA after transferring to a university and determined that a previous high GPA was the primary factor correlating to academic success and persistence of transfer students at the four-year institution. Ditchkoff *et al.* (2003) also found transfer GPA to be a positive estimation of transfer student success.

Campus Involvement and Faculty Collaboration

High levels of campus involvement and engagement with the degree program were also found to correlate to transfer student success (Johnson, 2005). Involvement in campus organizations including academic or cultural groups is an important part of a transfer student's success at a four-year institution (Laanan, 2007). Miller states that a lack of engagement with the campus community and integration into the institution is one of the greatest challenges faced by community college transfer students at four-year institutions in Texas (2013).

Cejda (1994) studied the impact of faculty collaboration on transfer student success and found solid statistical evidence to suggest that collaboration between faculty and transfer students reduced the amount of transfer shock experienced by transfer students and had a positive impact on their success. The transfer students who majored in education, where faculty collaboration had occurred, maintained higher GPAs than other transfer students (Cejda, 1994). Transfer students are more likely to have a successful adjustment to the university if they view their university professors as approachable, accessible, and interested in their academic development (Jackson and Laanan, 2015).

Degree Program and Levels of Engagement

The type of degree program a student transfers into is another key factor that correlates to the success or failure of transfer students. Research on the relationship between transfer students' majors and their academic performance found that math and science majors had statistically significant grade variations and GPA decline after transferring than students in other majors (Cejda *et al.*, 1998). Transfer students at a small liberal arts college majoring in education, fine arts, humanities, and social sciences experienced an increase in their post transfer GPA, known as transfer ecstasy, while students majoring in mathematics and sciences experienced transfer shock (Cejda, 1997). A recent study on the academic and social adjustment experiences of transfer students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines at a Midwest research university found that female students had more difficulty adjusting academically than males (Jackson and Laanan, 2015). While the majority of transfer students do experience transfer shock, their major can have a clear impact on their success after transferring.

High levels of engagement within a degree program is also a key factor to transfer student success. Johnson (2005), when comparing the academic performance of transfer and native students within the College of Natural Resources and Sciences at Humboldt State University, found no statistical difference between the performance and GPAs of transfer and native students. Johnson attributes this in part to the smaller class sizes and the degree program, since natural science programs provide students with more opportunities to interact more closely with their peers and professors. A similar study at Auburn University found that transfer students in the wildlife science programs had an easier adjustment to their new institution, which

could be attributed to the social security created by smaller class sizes (Ditchkoff *et al.*, 2003). An Australian study on transfer students majoring in accounting found the type of secondary school attended, previous year's academic grades, and level of interest in accounting as a discipline and profession to be key factors in a transfer student's success at the university (Tickell and Smyrnios, 2005).

Negative Original Perspective

A negative original perspective also correlates to the success or failure of transfer students at four-year institutions. Students who start off with a negative perspective about the four year institution will likely have a harder time adjusting after transferring (Laanan, 2007). Gawley and McGowan (2006) reported that disparity between colleges and universities with respect to workload and course work differences and stress over the awarding of college transfer credits were contributing factors to transfer students' success or failure. This disparity can also be a contributing factor to a negative perspective of the four-year institution.

It is clear that there isn't any one factor that determines whether transfer students will succeed or fail at their new institution. While previous academic success and GPA are often correlated to transfer student success, it is a combination of the above factors that contribute to the ease or difficulty of transfer student adjustment that leads to their persistence, long term success and degree completion.

Persistence and Success After the First Year

While there are many key factors that contribute to transfer shock and a student's initial success or failure at a new institution, it is important to understand what contributes to the long term success, persistence, and degree completion for a transfer student after the first year. Persistence has been defined as completing or actively working toward the bachelor's degree within a nine year period (Pascarella *et al.*, 1986, p. 18). Academic integration and student satisfaction were found to positively influence student persistence behavior (Liu and Liu, 2000).

An examination of long term persistence and withdrawal behavior for students who started postsecondary education at two-year institutions found differences between men and women in the direct effects of the different variables which impact degree persistence and completion (Pascarella *et al.*, 1986). This study also found secondary school success to have a positive direct effect on degree completion for men but was negatively influenced by commitment to their previous institution. By comparison, for women, socioeconomic status had a positive direct effect on degree persistence and secondary school social involvement had a positive impact on degree completion.

A student's GPA has been found to impact the long term success and persistence for transfer students. Johnson (1987) found that factors which affect transfer student persistence include academic performance, academic satisfaction, and academic integration and that a student's

GPA is correlated to whether he/she will continue to attend the next semester. An examination of transfer GPAs and their impact on the persistence behavior of transfer students at a four-year public university between 1999 and 2001 found that higher semester GPAs had a positive impact on higher persistence rates of transfer students (Ishitani, 2008).

Research on student graduation rates found that transfer students graduate at similar rates as native students (Glass and Harrington, 2002) and they are not less likely to graduate than native students (Holahan et al., 1983). However, Miller (2013) reported that data from four-year institutions in Texas showed that native students consistently graduate at higher rates than transfer students. Transfer students who transferred at the junior level with 60 or more credits were found to have considerably higher graduation rates than transfer students who entered with fewer credits (Best and Gehring, 1993). The long-term success and persistence of transfer students is influenced by several factors including GPA, prior academic success, and the time of transfer. Institutions need to be mindful of these influencing factors in order to best support transfer students.

Campus Support for Transfer Students

High levels of campus involvement, engagement within the degree program, and faculty collaboration are important key factors to a transfer student's success at their new institution, which can be be facilitated by formal or informal campus support. Campus support for transfer students can also help ensure transfer student persistence and completion of a bachelor's degree. The responsibility of transfer student success does not just fall on the student but on the institution as well (Jackson and Laanan, 2015). University faculty, staff, and administrators should be mindful of the different adjustment experiences of transfer students (Jackson and Laanan, 2015). Herrera and Jain (2013) explain that institutions should develop a transfer-receptive culture and make an institutional commitment to provide the support needed for transfer students to be successful.

Research on campus support for transfer students suggests that support for transfer students should be available at both the community college and the university level (Laanan, 2007). Creating partnerships between community colleges and universities provides students with an understanding that the community college and the university are both helping to guarantee their success (Jackson and Laanan, 2015). Laanan (2007) suggests that academic counselors at two-year colleges should be knowledgeable about the information and services prospective transfers need to make a successful transition to a four-year university.

Informal Support

Successful campus support for transfer students can happen in a variety of ways, one of which is through informal support. Jackson (2013) performed a qualitative study on the impact of support systems and mentor relationships of female transfer students in STEM disciplines. Students reported that meetings with their community college advisors prior to transferring

helped alleviate anxiety about the university environment and made it easier to transition to the university. Students also found their academic advisors at the university helpful providers of useful support (Jackson, 2013). Flaga (2006) found that students most often used informal connections with friends who were native university students to learn about the academic, social, and physical environment of the university and suggests formal peer mentor programs could facilitate the use of these informal support resources. Informal campus support can also be found at institutions that provide up to date and accurate information and appropriate resources for transfer students on their website and in printed materials (Marling, 2013).

Formal Campus Support Programs

Gawley and McGowan (2006, para. 60) recommend that universities provide unique services for college transfer students such as tailored orientations for new transfers along with “formalized and sustained social arrangements throughout the duration of a transfer’s time at university.” While academic advisors and faculty assistance can provide informal support to transfer students, Eggleston and Laanan (2001) state that campus support programs targeted directly to transfer students do not formally exist at most four-year universities. According to Swing as cited in (Eggleston and Laanan, 2001) about two thirds of colleges and universities have made marginal attempts to support transfer students. Examples include orientations, appointed transfer student liaisons, special seminars, faculty/staff and peer advising, special housing, and summer institutes. While formal campus support programs for transfer students have not been the norm, there have been some successful support programs in recent years as universities strive to be more responsive to transfer student needs (Eggleston and Laanan, 2001).

Eggleston and Laanan (2001) discuss and evaluate several different types of formal campus support programs for transfer students. The Exploring Transfer (ET) program at Vassar College was created to increase the persistence and enrollment of students from nearby community colleges by providing them with an opportunity to explore college life and experience senior level college courses. This program proved successful as 64% of participants enrolled in a four-year institution and 97 of them earned a bachelor’s degree. Summer bridge programs provide transfer students with an opportunity to become familiar with the academic and social environment of the campus in advance of the fall semester (Ackermann, 1991). The intent of these formal programs was to assist with student transitions and increase the rate of persistence, retention, and graduation for transfer students.

Formal campus support programs can assist students not only with the academic side of the transfer adjustment process, but also with personal, social, and financial needs. For example, the University of Arkansas created a program that serves the unique needs of non-traditional transfer students and offers assistance with child care, housing, and employment in addition to tutoring, study skills, mentoring, and peer counseling (Eggleston and Laanan, 2001). The Multicultural Transfer Admissions Program (MTAP) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign provides academic, personal, and financial support for transfer students (Eggleston and Laanan, 2001). Research on campus support for transfer students at both the

community college and university level, from informal faculty-student mentor relationships to formalized campus support programs, found that campus support has a positive effect on the adjustment process and ultimate long-term success of transfer students.

Conclusion

This article began with a broad discussion of adult transitional theory. Transition can be defined as a period in-between moments of stability, initiated by the move in between two socio-cultural systems, and in which a person is aware of changes in the environment that cause an internal re-adjustment. The level of difficulty that individuals experience during a transition causes a state of confusion and disorientation that is known as transition shock, which can be managed through self-care and the balancing of resources/deficits in order to develop external or internal coping mechanisms. A common form of transition shock is culture shock. Often illustrated as a U-curve, culture shock occurs when an individual must transition between a previous environment and a new one. Ideally, an individual going through a cultural transition will be able to blend norms and values in order to thrive in both the new and old cultures. The experience of a transfer student entering a new institution of higher education is a form of culture shock, commonly referred to as transfer shock.

Early definitions of “transfer shock” focused on the characteristic decline of transfer student GPA immediately following transition to new institutions of higher education and the corresponding recovery of academic performance in subsequent semesters. Current research has expanded the definition of transfer shock to incorporate the academic and social factors that contribute to increased attrition and lack of degree persistence exhibited by transfer students. Research also acknowledges the impact of individual academic ability and student major, grading variances between institutions, and attrition on measured levels of transfer shock. Increased variances of transfer shock have been experienced by students pursuing academic programs in the physical sciences versus the humanities and interventions for these disciplines is recommended. Lastly, findings demonstrate that pre-transfer communication between academic degree programs and cooperation between the sending and receiving institutions to align academic degree paths successfully mitigates pressures associated with transition and contributes to student persistence.

Studies on transfer students and transfer shock found a variety of key factors that correlate to the success or failure of transfer students. These include race, gender, time of transfer, GPA, prior academic success, level of campus involvement, faculty collaboration, degree program transferring into, level of engagement with the degree program, and negative original perspective. The key factors that correlated to transfer student success were GPA, prior academic success, faculty collaboration, high levels of engagement with the degree program, and campus involvement. Research on the long term success and persistence of transfer students suggests that GPA, prior academic success, and time of transfer influence transfer students’ degree completion. Campus support for transfer students is important for helping

transfer students succeed and research suggests that both informal support and formalized campus support programs are beneficial for the long-term success of transfer students.

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